

A
Brief and Easy
TREATISE
ABOUT
COMFORT.

Which Gods Children have
or at least earnestly desire, and
long after whilst they are in
this World;

Together with the Observations
of Comfort, and the Removal
of them.

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time Rector of Colgrave in Nor-
tingham-Shire.

L O N D O N.

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The Contents of the several Sections.

1. **O**F comfort in gene-
rall.
2. The hindrances of com-
fort.
3. Other hindrances of
a Christians comfort.
4. The Authors of a Christ-
ians trouble.
5. Of the connexion between
Grace, and comfort.
6. The sum of what remains.
7. Of Conversion.
8. Of sorrow for sin.
9. Of the pardonableness of
sin.

A 2

10. Of

The Contents.

10. Of the sin unto death.
11. Of the day of grace: the time of visitation, or the accepted time.

SECT.



SECT. I.

Of Comfort, in General.

IT ill becomes Christians to conceive of God, as of an *Aegyptian* Task-master, who only requires from his servants, the performance of their task, without respect to their comfort, and refreshment. Surely it is the entertainment of some such like

6 *Of comfort*

thoughts, which discourageth many from entering upon the service of God, and that which for a long time makes it tedious to many, who having engaged themselves already in his service, do proceed very heavily, and yet are so far convinced of the necessity of continuing therein, that they dare not entertain any thoughts of going back.

This no doubt is a very great injury to him, who is justly styled, *the God of all consolation*; and who hath by the Gospel so infinitely remitted the burden of that task, which
was

was required of man, when he was sufficiently able to undergo it: yea, and hath from age to age, been remitting it, till at length, the *Yoke be easie, and the burden light*; to all those who do impartially judge of it, and in the bearing of it do not make it grievous to themselves.

Far be it therefore from any that own themselves for the servants of the most high, to cast such an imputation upon their Lord and Master, and to disgrace his service by misrepresenting it to themselves, or others; as a *yoke which neither them-*
A 4 *selves.*

selves nor their Forefathers have been able to bear; although of necessity they have been constrained to bear it, only lest they purchase his displeasure, and so run themselves inevitably upon the ruine both of their souls, and bodies.

We cannot but receive the word of God, as a *systeme* of truths, the least title whereof will not admit of any appearance, or shadow of falshood, and if we are conversant therein, we meet with thousands of places, wherein it is not only attested by credible and unsuspected witnesses,

witnesses, that God is the
God of peace, joy, and
consolation, but demon-
strated also by those gra-
cious, and precious promi-
ses, which he hath made
for our comfort and en-
couragement in the ways
of holiness; and the many
historicall reports, of those
who have professed them-
selves to have received
the abundant consolations
of Christ, in their subject-
ion to the Gospel, though
called thereby to passive
duties, which of all others
are the hardest, and hea-
viest, the God of all grace.

But because it is matter
of undeniable Experience

10 *Of comfort, &c.*

that many of Gods true, and faithful servants complain of that small portion of these consolations, which they are made partakers of, which rather support them under the yoke of *Christs* service, than enable them to bear the burden with cheerfulness and delight: It will not be amiss to enquire whence this comes to pass, that afterwards we may the more effectually apply the remedy.

SECT.

SECT. 2.

The hindrances of comfort.

As the barrenness of land, where there is no defect on the husbandmans part, doth commonly proceed from one of the two contrary extreames of wet, and drought; so likewise the want of comfort in the souls of believers.

For on Gods part there is no defect, he being truly styled, (as was said before) the God of all consolation, and Christ the Prince of peace, and the Holy Ghost

Ghost, the comforter, and the Gospel glad tidings to all that receive it in faith. But there are two extreams, into which believers do commonly plunge themselves, if not to the total loss, yet to the very great abatement of those consolations, which they might otherwise in a very large measure be partakers of. For either they seek for, and expect comfort independent on duty, or else they wholly suspend their comforts on the performance thereof.

1. Sometimes a Child of God may grow careless.

less, and slothful, in the performance of duties, so that if he omit not that part which consists in bodily exercise, as praying, hearing, reading, &c. yet he is not carefull to exercise those graces, which are the very life, and soul of duty, and which indeed do give them the denomination of duty in the sight of God: And then no wonder if God withhold from him those consolations, which in this spirituall distemper might rather encourage him in his sloth; than quicken him to a more effectuall endeavour to.

to walk closely with God. Now therefore for such an one to expect an infusion of spirituall consolation in the way of his sloth and carnality, is altogether vain; because he doth thereby but invite God to encourage him in an evil way, which the holy God will never do.

How much less then have they any reason, to expect a share in these consolations, who not only neglect the internal exercise of grace, but also in a very great measure, through a greater prevalence of this spiritual sloth, do frequently omit
the

the external performance
of required duties?

Yea, so great sometimes
is the deceit of a Christi-
ans heart, in this particu-
lar, that they are apt to
say, I cannot do duties;
I have no heart to go to
ordinances, for I have no
comfort in my heart,
when I am about them,
I have no smiles of Gods
countenance upon my soul:
If the Lord would but be-
stow some comfort upon
me, then I could do du-
ties cheerfully, I could go
to ordinances willingly;
but while I am without
comfort I can do no-
thing.

Thus

16 *The hindrances*

Thus some by an error on the left hand, do in vain, seek for comfort, before and out of a way of duty.

2. Others sometimes fall as much short of their desired comfort, by an extreme on the right hand: for they are indeed very painful, and diligent in the performance of every known duty, and do not only mind the outside of duty, but do also very seriously engage their hearts to accompany their outward performances, by the exercise of every suitable and necessary grace, to the utmost of their
and T power.

power: but then they suspend their comfort on such an exquisiteness, and perfection of performance, as is either very rarely, or not at all attainable on this side heaven.

This, according to the best of my observation, is that spring of trouble, which feeds the minds, of many of Gods dear servants with a perpetuity of disconsolateness, drawing out their distempers to months, and years, and sometimes to the end of their lives. As they grow more diligent and serious in the performance of duties, they still discover
more

more & more of their own imperfections, and weakness; so that, though they do in good earnest make a progress in grace and holiness, yet their defects coming more to their sight and view, they think they do believe, whereby their troubles encrease upon them dayly, and their expected comfort flies further and faster, from them.

It fares with them herein, as with a man that falls by a rock, which seems to move from him, and the faster he falls, the more the rock seems to mend its pace flying from him,

him, though in truth the rock neither mends its pace, nor moves, but the ship in which the man is carried. So these persons, the swifter they row in the ship of duty to overtake comfort, the faster comfort seems to fly from them, when as in truth, it is not comfort that flies from them, but they fly from their comforts, while they place sincerity in a certain degree of perfection; and therefore will not own, nor receive those comforts, which the Gospel holds out to their sincerity, till they have attained that degree of their self-

self-limited perfection.
To clear this by an instance.

A Child of God being convinced of the evil of sin in generall, or of some sin in particular, knows that there is no hope of pardon without Godly sorrow, and repentance; and that every kind, or degree of sorrow is not sufficient. Therefore in order to his own practice, he lays down these two rules. First, that his sorrow must be true, and unfeigned. Secondly, That his sorrow must be proportionable to the evil of his sin. Hereupon he sets himself

self seriously by praying,
reading, &c. to discover
the evil of his sin in the se-
veral aggravations there-
of, that so the source
thereof may excite in him
a proportionable sorrow.
Now the issue hereof is
this: the more he search-
eth, and sees into the na-
ture, and evil of his sin,
the more unproportionable
he still finds his sorrow
to be to the hainousness of
his sin, so that his sorrow
in comparison thereof
seems to be no sorrow,
and much less, that true
and right sorrow, where-
to the promises of pardon
are made; and therefore
T O E 2 while

while he lies under this apprehension, he utterly refuseth and putteth away all that comfort, which in the promises is held out to the penitent sinner.

This may suffice to discover the second hindrance of a Christians comfort; but what a poor soul is to do in such a case, shall (God willing) be shewed afterwards in its proper place, when I come to speak of the remedy of these Evils.

SECT.

SECT. 3.

*Some other hindrances
of a Christians comfort.*

BESIDE those foremen-
tioned most usual lets
of a Christians comfort,
there are yet two other,
which are of no less ma-
lignant influence upon the
soul, for the disturbance
of the peace thereof, and
powerful for the exclu-
sion of that joy, which
would make a course of
holiness sweet to a belie-
ver, and render his Reli-
gion

24 *Some other hindrances*

gion the more amiable
in the sight of the by-
standers.

I. The first is a sus-
pition of the defect of
Grace, as to the being,
truth, or necessary degree
thereof. And what comfort
can any one take, who is
but serious about the
things that concern his e-
verlasting welfare, who ap-
prehends himself to be
wholly void of grace; or
looks upon his grace but
as common, not saving
grace; or if it seem to be sa-
ving grace; yet is so small,
weak, and altogether un-
proportionable to the
time, and means, he hath
en-

of a christians comfort. 25

enjoyed, that he seems rather to have less than he once had, which one thing is enough to make him suspect the truth of it, because true grace is a growing grace.

But the trouble arising upon this account, is not at all times, nor in all persons alike: for sometimes it is more fixed and *chronicall*, and sometimes more *volatile* and transient.

Sometimes this suspicion of the want of true grace, is rooted upon some mistaken notions, which through the want of means of better information,

26 some other hindrances
mation, or being pertinaciously retained, do long grow, and bring forth this uncomfortable fruit in the soul.

So some looking upon conversion as a very great, and manifest change wrought by the spirit of God, upon the whole man, because they are not sensible of any such manifest change wrought in them at any particular time, they lie long under the suspicion, that then sure they were never converted, and therefore have no true grace.

Or, although the signs whereby they prosecute the

of a Christians comfort. 27

the discovery of grace, be proper, yet through misapplication, or weakness in the application, they are not able by the use of them to discover that grace which they seek after.

There are not many that have that skill, and dexterity; in the application of signs, thereby to attain any probable and comfortable evidence of their state; and sometimes the signs they make use of, are such, that though if they could find those signs in themselves they might conclude grace, yet they find it no less difficult to find the reality of those

28 *Some other hindrances*

signs than of that grace, which by them they seek for. Hereupon they are necessitated to seek for the signs of those signs, & then for the reality of those subordinate signs, &c. till they have lost themselves in a maze of signs upon signs, and find it next to an impossibility to attain any clear discovery of grace, by the use of them: by which means it comes to pass that they lye long without that comfort, which some good probable evidence of the being and truth of grace might afford them. For instance, It is a true sign of grace, when
we

of a christians comfort. 29

we can find in our hearts an universal hatred of sin, as sin: It is not any kind of hatred of sin, but the hatred of sin, as sin: so that though we do find in our hearts, an hatred of sin, yet there is need of other signs whereby we may know whether we hate sin, as sin. Again,

Where there is true grace, there is a concatenation of all graces. Now before we can conclude from this sign, we must have the evidence of every particular grace, before we can come to the evidence of grace in generall.

30 *some other hindrances*

So when any one shall go about to seek for grace by its prevailing degree; it requires many signs, long observation, and much experience, before they can possibly know whether they have grace in a prevailing degree, or no.

2. Sometimes this suspicion of the want of grace is but occasionall and accidentall; and then commonly it is of no long continuance. This many times happens to those, who for the most part have such a probable evidence of the truth of heir grace, as doth quiet heir hearts, and enable them

of a christians comfort. 21
them comfortably to press
on towards a further
measure of grace, and a ful-
ler assurance of their in-
terest in the heavenly in-
heritance. But occasionally
in reading, or hearing,
they meet with some such
signs of true grace, or ne-
cessary properties of a
child of God, which, be-
cause at present they do
not easily discern in them-
selves, it raiseth some
doubts and fears in them,
which eclipse their former
comfort, and disturb their
peace, till by looking a-
gain over their former e-
vidences, they find no
cause of continuing those

33 *Some other hindrance*
new raised jealousies. But
the notes of difference that
are assigned, between
true and counterfeit,
saving and common grace,
a child of God and an hy-
pocrite, do not seldom raise
these jealousies, which
sometimes may be occasion
of long discomfort, yet (I
say) they are but of short
continuance.

2. An other grand hin-
drance of comfort, is a sus-
picion of the unpardo-
nableness of their sins or
at least of some particular
sin, which they imagine
was committed with such
aggravating circumstances,
as do exclude them from
the

of a christians comfort. 33

the benefit of the promises, viz. that it was committed wilfully, against their own light, and knowledge, and against the checks, and reluctancy of their own conscience, &c.

This cloud, though sometimes at first appearance it seems but small, yet in process of time it so overspreads, and darkens the soul, that it becomes the principle of dismall trouble and confusion, specially when it grows (as frequently it doth) to an imagination that they have *sinned against the Holy Ghost*. Then they throw off all offers of com-

34 *Some other hindrances*

fort from scripture and promises, as easily as *Sampson* broke the new cords wherewith he was bound. They give themselves up for reprobates, and account the scriptures and blood of *Christ* to signifie no more to them, than to the damned in hell.

This is a sad condition indeed, and commonly proves to be such a stubborn and untractable distemper, that the means applyed for cure, seems rather to encrease than abate the distemper; and indeed many times is not perfectly and thoroughly cured, till in the end of their days, God bring

of a christians comfort: 35

bring them within sight of heaven.

3. Sometimes poor Christians, though they look not upon their sins, as in themselves unpardonable, yet they think that their day of grace, and the accepted time for them is already past, and therefore that there is no room left them for hope.

This proceeds from the review of time past, wherein they see how many tenders, offers, and opportunities they have neglected, and how unprofitable, and barren they have been under the plentiful means of Grace, that they

36 *Some other hindrances*
they formerly have enjoyed, especially if God seem now to have deprived them of those means and opportunities: whence they conclude that God will wait upon them no longer, but hath concluded them in a state of unbelief, and reprobation, and that therefore it is a vain thing for them to strive and hope any longer, seeing that time past cannot be called again, nor neglected opportunities be redeemed.

4. To these may be added another froward distemper of mind, wherein the heart refuseth and slighteth.

of a christians comfort. 37

flighteth all comfort, which comes not in by the way of assurance. Hence it comes to pass that so long as they find not their corruptions so perfectly subdued, and their graces heighthened to that degree as may be to them a sufficient ground of full assurance, they are to themselves the authors of a very disconsolate condition, which many times, as it needs must, proves to be of long continuance.

For conclusion of this part of my discourse, I shall only add, that outward troubles, and a *melancholy* disposition of body and mind,
are

34 *Some other hindrances*

are sometimes, if not the primary inlets of disconsolateness, yet they are at least effectually obstructors and excluders of that comfort, which otherwise might be as sweet refreshing to their souls.

For although God bestow upon some, such a cheerful lightsome disposition, as easily admits every beam of comfort, and goes more lightly under the burden of afflictions; yet are the souls of others so grossly darkened with that black distemper of *melancholly*, & so deeply pierced by the dint even of light afflictions, that no indifferent

ferent cause of comfort will suffice to expel the blackness of the one, or heal the wounds which are made by the other.

Thus I have briefly discovered what those things are, which do not only hinder comfort, but also produce, augment, & continue those inward troubles which many of Gods people fall into, and so rob them of those sweet consolations which are their present portion, which their heavenly father hath assigned them for their support, in the midst of those many discouragements, which they meet with-

40. *The Authors of a*
withall in their holy pil-
grimage towards the hea-
venly *Jerusalem.*

SECT. IV.

*The Authors of a Chri-
stians trouble.*

HAVING now spoken of
the immediate causes
of a Christians trouble, it
will be very useful to say
something, before we pass
any further, concerning
the Authors of these trou-
bles.

1. It appears in the fore-
mentioned particulars, how
much the blame lies
upon

upon themselves, either through ignorance not knowing where to seek comfort, or through error going in a wrong way, or through weakness though the way be plain before them yet cannot they walk therein, or else through wilfulness when they, with the psalmist, refuse to be comforted, although there be sufficient ground whereupon to stay their souls: So that if they enjoy not that refreshing and reviving light of Gods countenance, they may in a great measure thank themselves as authors of that evil.

Neither

Neither may we excuse the Devil, who no doubt hath an hand to the utmost of his power in all the troubles and discomforts that befall any of Gods people.

Questionless his implacable malice doth drive him on with utmost fury, to endeavour the destruction of Gods people, and therefore it is not to be doubted, but that if he cannot turn them out of the way to happiness, yet he will make it as uncomfortable to them as he can. If he cannot separate them from the love of God in *Christ Jesus*, yet he will in-
ter-

terpose betwixt their souls
and the light of Gods
countenance, as much as
he can.

This he attempteth ei-
ther by temptation, where-
by he endeavoureth to
draw them to the com-
mission of those sins, where-
by he knows that God
will be provoked to with-
draw his comforts from
them; or else by casting
in suspicions, and blowing
upon the fuel of their own
home-bred misconceived
jealousies concerning their
state, that thereby he may
bring them to put from
them those comforts, that
do of right belong to them,
and

44 *The Authors of a*

and are held out by God
in his word to them.

3. But is there any evil
in the City, and the Lord
hath not done it? Surely
in these, as well as in all
other afflictions, God also
hath his hand, though in
a far different kind from
ourselves, and the Devil:
we foolishly, the Devil ma-
liciously, but God most
righteously, and wisely,
yea, and compassionately
too. Yet may we for the
most part thank our selves
for Gods having any hand
in our discomforts, so far
forth as they are evil and
afflictive; for he doth
not willingly grieve the
chil-

children of men; but, we by our security, presumption, sloth, worldliness, or some other particular sin, do provoke God to hide his face from us, and to let loose our enemies upon us, yea and to deliver us up to our own jealousies, and suspicions to be our tormentors; and then no wonder if we be troubled, untill we return to meet the living spring of our comfort again.

S E C T.

S E C T. V.

Of the connexion between grace, and comfort.

I shall now pass on towards the remedy of these evils, and so to make enquiry after that true comfort which all believers desire, but not many attain unto, at least in that degree and measure which they might, were it not for some or other of the forementioned hindrances. In order hereunto I shall lay down some preparatory propositions, con-

between grace, and *Ec. 47*
concerning the connexion
between grace, & comfort,
the want of knowing, or
believing whereof is some-
times matter of ill conse-
quence to the people of
God, in respect of their
comfort.

I. Prop. Wheresoever
there is true grace, in
how weak and small a de-
gree soever it be, there is
a foundation for solid com-
fort, yea even for assurance,
and the comforts that do
naturally flow therefrom.

Many have proved suf-
ficiently against the *Armi-*
nians, that whosoever hath
true grace, shall certainly
be saved, because it is im-
possible

possible (respecting the degrees and promises) that a truly sanctified person should totally and finally fall from grace, and so be damned. This is said, not of any certain degree of grace, but of the truth of grace, how small soever the degree be; for grace in the smallest degree is as truly grace as in the greatest degree. Now the consequence is undeniably good, that if they who have the least degree of true saving grace, shall certainly be saved, then the least degree of that grace is a foundation in itself, sufficient for comfort

between grace and &c. 49

comfort and assurance;
For assurance of salva-
tion, and the comforts
thence arising do naturally
flow from the assured
knowledge of the truth of
grace, and there is none
that hath true grace, in
what degree soever, but
he is in a capacity of
knowing that he hath that
grace. I know that the
comfort of assurance is not
an ordinary companion of
the weakest grace: how-
ever sometimes at first
conversion, when we may
reasonably suppose grace
to be in the smallest de-
gree, it pleases God to
make the infusion of grace
his G so

30 *Of the connexion*

so manifest, to the converted person, as that they have thereby the comfortable assurance of their salvation; although that assurance do continue sometimes but a very short while, and is seldom of long continuance before it be darkened again by temptation. However if there were not a sufficient foundation for assurance, there could not be any true comfort upon that account, no not for a moment.

2. Prop. The smaller degrees of grace are very hardly discernable: This comes to pass in some by reason of the many lusts
and

between grace, and C. 5. 1

& corruptions, which upon the first entrance of grace are not all at once expelled, or subdued, but continue opposing themselves, and making head against grace, for the rooting of it out again; which though they cannot effect, yet do they often prevail against grace (yet in its infancy) and by their strength and multitude do so overwhelm, and as it were, bury that small grace, that the poor soul is not able certainly to say whether there be any such thing or no.

○ In other some, a good naturall disposition, specially
C 2 if

52 *Of the connexion*

if meliorated, and mended by civill or religious education, doth bear so neer a resemblance to true grace, that it is no easie matter to discern the one from the other; so that the sincere soul being ever suspicious of it self, doth not dare to conclude that there is any thing at all better in it than morall vertue. And then, beside all this, the grand enemy of our comfort and salvation will be sure to take advantage of these, and all other occasions of suspicion, and by his temptations and suggestions to improve them to the utmost

between grace and C. 33

most disadvantage to the soul, whereby (if possible) to hinder it from the comfortable evidence of the truth of Grace.

3. Prop. There is no degree of grace so large, evident, and conspicuous, but that it may sometimes disappear: Even the Sun it self hath suffered an Eclipse, when the Sun of righteousness in his desertion cryed out, *my God my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* How much less then can any of the stars, though of the first and greatest magnitude, be secure from being obscured sometimes by a

C 3. thick

54 *Of the connexion*

thick clouds. Great graces do not absolutely secure the owners thereof from great falls, and no wonder then if great falls bring an Eclipse upon greatest graces, and so obscure the clearest evidences, and brightest comforts, that might flow from them. Remember *Adam, Noah, Lot, David, Peter, &c.* and let him that stands take heed lest he fall; and when thy mountain doth stand strongest, know that possibly God may hide his face, and leave thee under the power of troubles.

These three propositions I have laid down

between grace and C. 35.

as a ground work where-
upon to build, and they
are useful to the pro-
duction of these three co-
rollaries.

1. That there are none
of Gods people excluded
from comfort, how weak
and small soever their
graces may be, that none
may reject their own mer-
cies, and say, comfort be-
longs not to me, because I
have not yet attained to
such a degree of grace: for
much as every child of
God is, though not equal-
ly capable, yet capable of
equall comforts with o-
thers, the weakest with
the strongest, and the
C 4 middle

56 *Of the connexion*

middle size with both.

Yea, God is pleased sometimes to impart those comforts to infant-grace, which he may deny to others throughout their whole course, though they may arrive to good attainments in grace; unto whom that speech of *Christ* may fitly be applied, that *the first are last, and the last are first.*

2. That degree of grace which constitutes the middle size, and so includes the generality of true Christians, though in it self it render persons more capable of solid comfort

between grace and &c. 57

fort than the former, yet is more liable to fears, doubts, and troubles, than any other; which will not seem strange, if we consider this threefold ground thereof.

1. That, that peace, & comfort which they have, is commonly rather negative than positive, consisting rather in the absence of trouble, than in the sureness, and solidity, of the grounds, whereupon they build. For, alas! it is too common even with those that have true grace to content themselves with common probabilities, and such hopes as spring
C. 5 there-

there-from, without frequent renewing the ingrafting, and justifying acts of faith, or rising into their evidences to find out those of them that are unerring, and will not fail them when they come to a pinch: Like a man that hath been long in possession of an estate, though he have good writings for it in his box, yet contents himself with his present quiet possession, and is not able on the sudden to prove the firmness and goodness of his title, when it comes to be questioned.

2. Hence it comes to pass

between grace and C^c. 59

pass that when their peace comes to be disturbed, they are not able so clearly to discern and make out the truth of their graces, as to shut out and repel the assault of temptations and fears. They have then their indubitable evidences to seek, and as it often falls out in other things, when we are most in haste, we least of all know where to seek or find the thing we want; so when the sudden onset of temptations constrains us to make good our title to *Christ*, and the love and favour of God, in that hurley burley and confusion, which

which is raised in the soul thereby, we know no more for the present how to make good our title, than if we never had any.

3. We may yet assign this higher reason, that it pleaseth God to restrain Satan from assaulting the infant-grace of his little ones, that they may not be discouraged from a way & course of holiness, before they are hardened and habituated thereunto. As a Captain will not set his fresh-water Souldiers to bear the brunt of the day, lest he discourage them for ever after. But when God hath for a certain time trained

up

between grace and c. 61.

up his servants in their postures of grace and holiness, he then leads them forth to the tryall, to see how they can endure the shock of temptations.

3. None can promise themselves an uninterrupted course of peace & comfort, how high degrees of grace soever they may possibly have attained unto. Nay, many times God suffers his strongest servants to encounter with the strongest interruptions; so that although there be no true comfort, nor can be, where there is no true grace, yet the severall degrees of comfort do not necessarily

62 *The Sum of what*
necessarily and constantly
accompany and flow from
proportionable degrees of
grace.

SECT. VI.

*The Sum of what re-
mains to be done.*

HAVING now laid the
ground-work, I pass
on to the superstructure:
yet I must premise thus
much, that those troubles
and disquietments of mind,
which many times befall
the people of God, are for
the most part grounded
upon.

remains to be done. 63

upon some mistakes and misapprehensions, which if once rectified, there would need but little, if any thing more, to reduce them to a quiet and comfortable state and posture of spirit. Therefore the remainder of my present task will stand in two attempts:

1. To lay down some propositions, for the rectifying of those mistakes, and the answering of all objections that are grounded thereupon.

2. To give some plain, easie, and brief directions for the attaining of true, solid peace and comfort,
so

64 *Of conversion.*

so grounded, as that it may be less liable to the common assaults, or more easily recoverable, if at any time it be overlouded.

SECT. VII.

Of conversion.

I Shall begin with those propositions, which relate to conversion, because it is the first saving work upon the soul; and therefore some sound believers being in the dark concerning that first necessary

cessary work, they are much tempted to suspect all their evidences of after-grace.

The substance of this work consists in that real change, which is wrought in the whole man, whereby he is turned from sin and Satan unto God, and is brought out of a state of nature into a state of grace.

But those doubts and fears, which arise many times in the hearts of Gods children, are not about the nature, and notion of conversion, but spring from mistakes about the circumstances there-

68 *Of conversion*

thereof; concerning which therefore I shall lay down these following propositions.

1. Prop. A man may be converted, or in a state of grace, yet not know it. And this either,

1. For some time immediately after conversion: as in all probability an infant, for some time after its birth, doth not put forth any of those reflex acts, whereby it judgeth itself to be alive. Though I may not say, that a new convert is, like an infant, incapable of exerting such reflex acts, yet certainly many do not, or if they
make

make attempts, yet sometimes the reality of their conversion is too obscure for them to discern, in that infant-state.

2. This also may be the condition of a true believer in his adult or grown state, to be ignorant of his conversion, and that either from the beginning of the work of grace in his heart, or by some after-occasional darknings. I do not mean, that a man may know he hath true grace, and yet not know whether ever he were converted or no, but taking conversion for the first entrance into a state of true grace, who-

68 *Of conversion.*

whosoever doubts or is ignorant of his being in a state of grace, by what means soever it comes to pass, must needs also be equally in doubt of his conversion; except with the *Arminians, Socinians, &c.* he think that true grace may be totally lost: which is an error of very dangerous consequence, and therefore of necessity to be rectified.

2. Prop. A man may be in a state of grace, and yet not know the time of his conversion: nay, he may have good evidence that he is in a state of grace, and from thence
may

conclude, that for certain there was a particular time of his conversion, and yet not know when that time was.

Indeed when he is once come to that conclusion, that he is in a state of grace, he may probably conclude that such a particular time was the time of his passing from death to life, but yet some cannot go so far in conjecturing at the particular time, that work having been wrought in them while they were very young; or otherwise wrought by such gentle and graduall means (as good education, or

or the like) that it was not possible for them almost, to discern when they passed from the utmost bounds of common grace, into a state of speciall grace. And this I take to be a common case among many believers now a-days.

3. Prop. That change which is wrought in conversion is more in the inward, than in the outward man. I speak now in respect of reality, and not in respect of outward appearance; although it be true also, that many times that change which is wrought by conversion hath so great
an

an influence upon the outward man, in point of action & conversation, that the change is very manifest and visible: yet I say that the radicall and principall change is in the inward man.

This is manifest by the word, by which repentance is generally exprest in the new Testament, as a member of conversion: as in that remarkable conjunction of repentance, and conversion in *Act. 3. 19.*

Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. The word which
we

we translate [repent] signifies a changing of the mind, which is the primary act of repentance, and part of conversion; although secondarily, there be divers other things that pertain thereto.

This is also manifest in that other expression, whereby *Christ* recommended the same thing to *Nicodemus*, under the name of regeneration, or a new birth. For it is evident that the body is not born again (which was *Nicodemus's* grosse apprehension at the first) neither is the soul, as to the being or substance thereof born again,

again, yet no doubt but some very great change and remarkable alteration is noted to us by such an expression.

It remains therefore that this grand alteration must needs be in the morall principles, dispositions, and affections of the soul, which also hath a suitable influence upon the external actions and conversation, producing a greater or lesser change in them, according as there is need, in respect of the greater or lesser preceeding depravation of them, by custom in sinning, or otherwise.

4 Prop. There may be

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74 *Of conversion.*

a great change wrought in the outward man, without true conversion.

Many faults may be reformed, many sins forsaken, many duties taken up, with a profession of religion, and yet such an one come short of true conversion; because all this may be done upon such grounds and reasons as are far inferiour to that of true conversion; such as are carnall fear or hope, gripes of conscience, the outward inconveniences and discommodities of their sinful courses, as diseases, poverty, disgrace, and the like.

5. Prop.

5. Prop. On the other side, there may be true conversion where the change of the outward man is but small. A good disposition may restrain a man much from the commission of many gross sins, and the fear of penall laws may do something; but religious education, or an hypocritical profession of religion may carry men far, not only in avoiding all open sins, but also in putting them forward to the performance of all visible duties, yea, and of many secret duties also, so that there may be little wanting to the making up of

D 2 the

the whole carcasſe, and outside of religion. Yea, they may go so far herein, that their outward conversation may be more commendably religious, than the conversations of some truly converted persons: there may be nothing manifestly wanting, but an inward principle of holiness, to make their actions and conversations truly holy. Then when it once pleaseth God, by his renewing grace to convert them, *i. e.* to work in them an inward principle of holiness, this makes little, or no alteration in the outward man, but only actuates

actuates and informs their wonted actions and conversations anew, whereby that which before was evil and displeasing to God, not in the matter of it, but in the principle from whence it flowed, now becomes acceptable to God, and truly holy. As an army of rebels may be good Souldiers and have good military discipline among them, but their only fault is, that they follow the conduct of a rebel general: and these only by accepting a new General, and owning their true Lord and King may become faithful Souldiers.

diers and loyall subjects,
without new moulding
their army, or changing ar-
mour or discipline.

When God first formed
man out of the earth, he
fashioned his body com-
pleat in all the parts and
proportions thereof, yet
was it not a man while it
was without a soul, but
when God breathed the
the breath of life into it,
there was no alteration
made in the body, but by
the only addition of a soul
it became a living man. In
like manner by the com-
mon workings of the spirit
there may be the outward
form and lineaments of a
Christian,

Christian, without the truth and life of Christianity, till the same spirit by his speciall operation actuate that carcasse of Christianity with a new inward principle of spirituall life and holiness; and then there is a Christian indeed, although little alteration appear in the outward conversation and visible part of Christianity.

6. Prop. If any through evill education, example, custom, disposition, or grosse ignorance, have lived a loose, vitious, debauched, profane life, have been a contemner or opposer of the ways of God,

or a neglecter of the common known duties of Christianity, (I say) if ever such an one be converted, certainly they pass under a very great change, not only inwardly in their mind and affections, but also outwardly in all the visible parts of their conversations. As is to be seen in the instances of *Zachary*, *Mary Magdalen*, *Paul*, and the *Corinthians*, 1 Cor. 6. 9, 10, 11.

I have purposely forbore any formall answer to objections, because whatever scruples ordinarily arise in the doubting

ing soul concerning this business of conversion, the answer to them, I think, may be easily gathered out of the foregoing propositions, and therefore I may save my self that labour. As for instance,

If any one think, that if ever they were truly converted, they must needs know the time, or at least the thing it self, and are therefore ready to conclude, that the work was never wrought in them, because they know it not: to this they may have satisfaction from the first, and second propositions. Or if they doubt of their

LECT. D 5. com

conversion, because they never knew of any such remarkable change in themselves, as conversion is ordinary supposed to import: to this they may receive an answer from the fifth proposition; and so of others. And this method I have thought most convenient, and therefore shall observe it in the following part of this discourse.

SECT.

SECT. VIII.

Of sorrow for sin.

1. Prop. **T**Rue godly sorrow for sin may be occasioned at first by something else than the sense of the evil of sin in its own nature. Sicknes, losses, disgrace, and the like, may be the first exciting cause of sorrow; but by these streams of affliction God may, and many times doth, (by the conduct of his word) lead the sinner to the fountain of sin; so as that which at first appeared evil and hateful to him only in the
sad

sad effects thereof, may now at last be found by him to be much more evil and loathsome in its own nature, and in those more dreadful effects which it produceth in spirituall respects; as, the losse of Gods favour, the debasing of the soul here, and the damnation both of soul and body hereafter. Thus that sorrow which at first was but carnall, may by this means come to be swallowed up of that which is more spirituall, and so become an holy, and godly sorrow. Yet it may be that all carnall sorrow may not hereby be
so

so swallowed up, as that nothing thereof shall remain: so that the mourning sinner is not therefore to judge all his sorrow to be carnall, because there are some mixtures of carnality in it; forasmuch as this grace, as well as all other graces, is but imperfect in this our state of flesh and imperfection; but rather judge it to be true, because there is a manifest appearance of some mixture of godly sorrow. Yet must you strive dayly to refine it from the drosse of carnality, it being the perfection of a Christian on this side heaven.

ven, to be dayly perfecting by degrees those graces whose perfection (or abolition) is reserved for heaven.

2. Prop. There is no sorrow of what nature, or in what degree soever, that beares a legal proportion to any, though the least, sin.

By a legall proportion, I mean, that which the law requires, which is no other, nor less than will make satisfaction for the breach of the law: so that if any kind or degree of sorrow bear a legall proportion to any sin, it is satisfactory to justice, and
so

so meritorious of pardon. Whether therefore any one should suspend their comfort upon such a kind or proportion of sorrow for sin, may without difficulty be rightly determined by any one but a *Papist* or a like principled. So then, while the troubled soul rakes in its own sores to find a sorrow proportionable to the sins they stand guilty of, they too much justify that doctrine, which in their principles they will most fearlessly deny; and while through this error they seek righteousness by the law, they do unwittingly keep

keep themselves under the curse, at least as to their own sense, and lose the benefit of the Gospel, at least as to the present comfort of it. Gal. 3. 10, 21. 13. Prop. Every degree of true godly sorrow bears a Gospel proportion to every sin: that is, it is that sorrow which the Gospel requires, not by way of satisfaction, as the law doth, but to put the sinner into a preparative capacity to receive Christ and pardon through him. For this is not the difference between the law and the Gospel in requiring the same thing; that the law

law requires a greater degree, & the Gospel is content with a less degree; but the true difference consists in this, that what the law requires, it requires in perfection, in order to justification immediately; but what the Gospel requires, it requires in sincerity with reference to Christ and life by him.

But what then? Is the least degree of this or any other grace in sincerity and truth, the most that the Gospel requires?

No verily: for the Gospel calls for perfection, yea and a greater perfection than

than the law it self doth;
but this is the indulgence
of the Gospel, that the
first and least degree of
grace in truth and fin-
cerity, puts the person into
a respective capacity, of
partaking of the promises
and benefits of the Gos-
pel, it allowing him and
requiring him all the re-
mainder of the days of his
life, to be perfecting his gra-
ces, & thereby to be grow-
ing up in *Christ*, his head,
when he comes to be fully
and perfectly united to
Christ, he may in him be
perfect in holiness, and
happiness together.

4. Prop. That is true
sorrow,

sorrow, which produceth a willingness to be delivered from the power of all sin: a reall willingness, though the flesh may gainsay and be unwilling. For it is no strange thing for such contradictions to be found in Gods children, so long as they have flesh as well as spirit, the flesh will be lusting against the spirit as well as the spirit against the flesh, *and these two are contrary.*

I choose to note out sorrow by its effects rather than by describing it in its nature, because it is much more discernable in its effects than in its nature, *and*

and the truth of it, in this effect, as much, if not more than in any other effect thereof.

Prop. That is godly sorrow which produceth a sight of our need of Christ, and a willingness to close with him on the terms of the Gospel. For whereas the tenour of the Gospell is comprehended in those two words repent and believe, such a repentance is spoken of, as prepares and leads a man to Jesus Christ, and that is the repentance which God requires, and in the Gospel calls for.

I need not precisely distinguish

distinguish between godly
sorrow and true repen-
tance, which are frequent-
ly used as terms of the
same import in scripture,
although it do distinguish
them also, but so as that
godly sorrow doth cer-
tainly produce repentance
to salvation; and therefore
whether mediately or im-
mediately, it matters not;
but certainly that sorrow is
according to God and the
Gospel, which prepares
the heart to receive *Christ*
by faith; and then it is
easie to judge whether
that sorrow for sin,
which brings a man to see
an absolute necessity of
Christ

Christ, and produceth a willingness to close with him upon the terms of the Gospel; be a godly sorrow or no.

6. Prop. The fear of Hell and damnation is no unlawful or ungodly ingredient of godly sorrow. It is a matter of great perplexity to the souls of many of Gods Children to find upon serious consideration, that the fear of being everlastingly damned, hath a great influence upon that sorrow for sin, and fear of sinning which they really find in themselves, judging all such sorrow to be carnall,

nall, because it proceeds not purely from a principle of love to God. Indeed I cannot but look upon it, at least as a piece of great inconsiderateness in some, who teach, that godly sorrow for sin doth purely respect God and his goodness, and that, that which respecteth the safety of the soul from damnation is legall, and carnall; which is a doctrine that is contrary both to the principles of nature, and the word of God, and Gospel of Jesus Christ. Whoever thought it unlawfull to fear the plague, sword, famine, payson, or the like,

like, upon this very account, because they are destructive to the body? or to sorrow for those outward evils when present, as well as to fear them, when they are yet but imminent? and that for the bodies sake, the being whereof is endangered thereby? And if it be lawfull to fear and grieve, for the sake of the body, those evils, which threaten the ruine thereof, how much more con-
spicuous to reason is it, to fear and grieve for sin, and its consequents, upon the soules account, which is thereby endangered to
be

be lost for ever.

But to let pass such argumentations. Hath not God also in his word both permitted and commanded that we should have so much respect to our own immortal souls, as well as to his pleasure and honour, as for the sake of them, and their safety to fear sin, hell, & damnation, yea, and God himself too because of his power to destroy, *Heb. 4. 1. Mat. 10. 28.* And if to fear sin, upon that account, so as to avoid the commission of it, then also upon the same account to grieve and sorrow for sin, when committed;

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mitted;

mitted; and if we may
fear God because of his
power to destroy, then may
we also sorrow for sin,
through fear of Gods dis-
pleasure, and the display-
ing of that his power for
the everlasting destruction
both of the soul and body
of the sinner.

I say not, but that sor-
row for sinners arising
from a principle of love
to God, may be esteemed
the more childlike dispo-
sition, and an higher at-
tainment, and therefore
to be laboured after: yet
this I say also, that it is
not at all alien from the
property of a good Son
to

to grieve for an offence committed against his father, for fear of the effects of his fathers displeasure.

These propositions may be so applyed, as to resolve all doubts and scruples that may arise concerning the occasion, measure, truth, or Gospel rectitude of sorrow for sin whereby it may be distinguished from legall and carnall, or defective, which are usually the matter of the troubled souls perplexities about this point.

THE SECOND SECTION

100 *Of the pardonableness*

SECT. IX.

*Of the pardonableness
of sin.*

AS the assurance of the pardon of sin cannot but be matter of great joy to the people of God, and is that which in all their troubles their hearts pant after; so also to be assured that their sins are pardonable, is matter, at least, of negative comfort: But to lye under the sense of sin as unpardoned, and to apprehend it as unpardonable too, cannot

not but be matter of great
horror to the soul.

But these apprehen-
sions do proceed many
times, partly from the vio-
lence of temptation, and
partly also from some mis-
takes about the pardo-
nableness of sin; and there-
fore, obviating the one,
and removing the other,
I shall lay down these
following propositions.

1. Prop. All sin how
great or small soever, is
unpardonable after death,
i. e. if it be unpardoned
at death. For death doth
absolutely fix every one
in that condition, wherein

E 3 they

102 *Of the pardonableness*
they die, so that if sin were
then pardoned, it is par-
doned for ever, but if it
were then unpardoned, it
is not only unpardoned,
but also unpardonable for
ever.

2. Prop. All the sins of
an unregenerate person
are unpardonable, while
he is such. But this is not
such a fixed unalterable
unpardonableness as the
former, but only in rela-
tion to that state; so that
those sins, which to an un-
regenerate person are al-
together unpardonable,
while he continues in that
state, are all pardonable,
yea, and actually pardoned,
as

as soon as ever his state
is changed from unreg-
neracy, to regeneracy.
Therefore saith the A-
postle, Repent and be con-
verted, that your sins may
be blotted out.

Prop. All the sins
of every one of Gods chil-
dren are pardonable, by
virtue of their state, at be-
ing in Christ, and so recon-
ciled to God, although
the actuall application of
that pardon be suspended
upon their actuall repen-
tance and faith for the
most part. However all
those that are once en-
grafted into Christ by
faith, are so provided for

104 *Of the pardonableness*
by him, that as they can-
not sin any sin that is in
it self unpardonable, so
neither can they commit
any sin with such circum-
stances, as that eventual-
ly it should prove unpar-
donable to them, but shall
sooner or later be cer-
tainly pardoned upon
their certain performance
of the condition of pardon
through *Christ*.

4. Prop. All sins are in
themselves pardonable,
except *the sin unto*
death.

For God hath not, by
any peremptory decree,
made known unto us in
his word, so foretalled the
par-

pardon of any particular sin, whether we consider it in the horridness of its nature, or in the hainousness of its circumstances, but that upon the terms of repentance, and faith, it is pardonable; except that sin which is called *the sin unto death*.

Of this also (I suppose) we cannot properly say, that it is unpardonable, although the person guilty thereof should repent and believe; but it is a sin of that nature, that doth absolutely bind up the heart of the sinner from repenting and believing, so that his repenting and believing are

106 *Of the sin unto death.*
as impossible as his being
pardoned.

SECT. X.

Of the sin unto death.

I Hinted before, that the
troubled souls apprehen-
sions of the unpardo-
nableness of their sins doth
sometimes rise so high,
as to an imagination that
they have sinned against
the Holy-Ghost; and then
we may easily conceive,
what unspeakable hor-
rour is consequent there-
upon, and how incurable
this

Of the sin unto death 157

this distemper must needs be, till that conceit be removed; because the scripture hath so expressly said of this sin, that it shall never be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.

But what this sin is? Wherein it doth consist? Whether there be but one, or more of this nature? Whether it be any particular act? Or whether any sin may become a sin unto death, or the sin against the Holy Ghost, by reason of such circumstances as may attend it? These are matters of controversy, wherein I will

not

108 *Of the sinners death.*

not now undertake, to be an umpire between the differing parties; because I suppose it would little conduce to the healing of that distemper, which I have now in hand, in regard that when I have said all I can, these things will be matter of controverse still: and besides something else may be said of this matter which will not be matter of dispute, and yet may be more effectual for curing the forementioned distemper.

1. Observe therefore that there are but four places found (at least that are commonly taken notice

of the sin unto death. 109
tice of) in the new Testa-
ment, which make any
mention of an unpardo-
nable sin, two whereof
give us only the names
without any description,
and the other two give us
descriptions without any
names.

The first of those two
places where such a sin is
named, is *Matt. 22. 31, 32.*
where it is called, *the blas-
phemy against the Holy-
Ghost.*

The other place is *1 Joh.*
5. 16. where it is called,
the sinne unto death.

Whether these two
names expresse to us one
and the same thing, it mat-
ters.

¶ 10. Of the sin unto death.

ters nothing to the present purpose (though I encline to think they are but the same) but this is out of question that both these expressions note out to us an unpardonable sin. For of the first *Christ* saith expressly, *that it shall never be forgiven*: and of the other, and it is implied in the very name, that it obligeth the sinner inevitably to death.

Yet in these places there are no clear descriptions of the sin so named although in the first, the occasion of *Christ*'s speech may give some hint what his meaning is, but not with

Of the sin unto death. III
without some obfcuri-
ty.

But if the attributing of
those miracles which
Christ did by the power
of the Holy-Ghost which
he had without measure,
to a Diabolical art or
power, be that sin (as seems
most plain from the place)
then I suppose there will
hardly be any troubled
soul found, which can with
any shew of truth charge
this sin upon it self.

2. But if this fact of the
scribes and Pharisees for
which Christ chargeth
them with the Blasphemy
against the Holy-Ghost, be
but one particular branch
of

112 *Of the sin unto death.*

of the sin against the Holy Ghost, we shall hardly know what other branches fall under this head, except we find them in *Heb. 4. 5, 6.* and *Heb. 10. 26, 29.* which are those other two places, wherein we find an unpardonable sin described without any speciall name.

And indeed it is the received opinion, that these places do describe to us the sin against the Holy Ghost, which wants not its probability, because it is apparent that these places describe to us an unpardonable sin; and *Christ* in the other places seems to tell us, that there is no other

of the sin unto death. 113

ther sin unpardonable, but
only the sin against the
Holy-Ghost. But however,
whether it be the sin a-
gainst the Holy-Ghost or
not, which the Apostle
describes in those passages
to the Hebrews, yet this I
have observed, that those
who in the trouble of their
souls do charge themselves
with the commission of
the sin against the Holy-
Ghost, do generally
ground, and build their
charge upon this notion,
that the sin there descri-
bed, is the sin against the
Holy-Ghost, and they con-
ceive that they have com-
mitted some sins like unto
those.

114. Of the *sinners* described.
those there described. And
therefore it will be most
pertinent to the case in
hand, to clear the meaning
of those places.

It would be but little
satisfaction to the troubled
soul to say (with some) that
the Apostles [it is impossi-
ble to renew them again to
repentance] doth not speak
of an absolute impossibili-
ty, but of a very great diffi-
culty; as when Christ
seemed to make it an im-
possible thing for a rich
man to be saved, yet that
it was not impossible with
God.

I will not take upon me
to disprove that interpre-
tation,

ration; but that which will be most satisfactory is to suppose the worst (as to be sure the troubled soul will doe) and so to look upon it as real impossibility for such an one, as the Apostle there speaks of, to be renewed again to repentance.

And then I shall first lay down these unquestionable propositions by way of premissall.

1. Prop. It is certain that those, who have not only received some enlightnings, and common graces of the Spirit, but are also really and truly sanctified, may through temptation
and

116 Of the sin unto death
and infirmity; doe those
things, which they know
to be sin : as no doubt but
David knew murder and
adultery to be sins ; and
Peter could not but know
it to be a sin to deny *Christ*;
and to common experience
will bear witnesse to the
same.

2. Prop. It is as certain
that the will may consent
to the commission of known
sins. *David* was not con-
strained to the commission
of the forementioned sins :

3. Prop. And it is no less
certain that such may be
renewed again to repen-
tance : as *David* and *Peter*
were. Yet no doubt but
such

of the sin unto death. 17

such circumstances do render the sin more than ordinary hainous.

From hence we conclude, that except we make the doctrinall and historical parts of Scripture absolutely repugnant, and contrary to each other; yea one doctrinall part to another, we may safely say, that a person who hath been enlightened, and received the knowledge of the truth, hath tasted the heavenly gift, been made partaker of the Holy-Ghost, and tasted of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come, may with

so begeth the Gospel to external

and of the *swarte death*.
external evident comput-
tion commit great and
known sins, without being
sealed up under impeniten-
cy; or his sin necessarily
acquiring the black and
horrid die of unpardona-
bleness thereby.

But then as touching the
meaning of the Apostle
in the forementioned
places, to me it seems plain
to any considerative and
impartial eye, that the
Apostle speaks onely of to-
tal Apostacy, and pro-
pounds that dreadful
doome onely against Apo-
states, and those who ha-
ving received and owned
the truth of the Gospel of
Jesus

Of the sin unto death. 119

Jesus Christ, do afterwards without any compulsion, or other seeming necessity, wholly renounce Jesus Christ, and all the truths of the Gospel, and become open and professed enemies thereunto.

This is apparent in the former place, where the Apostle saith not, if such shall fall into sin, but if such shall fall away, that is, wholly turn away from Christ and the Gospel, utterly renouncing them as fables and impostures. And for the other place, it is as apparent that the Apostle speaks not of every wilful sin, or sin against knowledge, but
such

120 of the sinners death
such wilfull sinning; as
whereby a man declares
himself an adversary and
professed enemy to *Christ*
and the Gospel, as it were,
trampling upon *Christ*, in
that he makes no more ac-
count of his blood, than of
the common blood of a ma-
lfactor; and doing despite
to the spirit of grace, by
whom he had before been
brought so far onward in
Christianity, as to know
Christ, and to acknowledg
the truth of the Gospel,
and make a profession of
religion.

For further satisfaction;
I refer you to Dr. Ganga
upon these places, in his
Com-

Of the sin unto death. 121

Comment on the Epistle to
the Hebrews.

But these things are so
clear, that whether we look
upon these places as con-
taining a description of the
sin against the Holy-Ghost
or not, yet it is manifest
that howsoever the trou-
bled soul may apprehend
itself guilty of sins aggra-
vated with wilfulness, or
other like hainous circum-
stances, yet if they come
short of totall apostacy
from *Christ*, and open re-
nouncing of the Gospel,
they cannot reasonably
conclude from these places
that there sins are unpar-
donable, and themselves
F sealed

122 *Of the ſin unto death.*

ſealed up under a ſtate of
impenitency, and there-
fore they are to look up-
on theſe thoughts as temp-
tations caſt in by the Devil,
for the hindrance of them
from returning to *Chriſt*
for the cure of their ſpiri-
tual diſtempers, and the
recovery of the joys of
their ſalvation.

TO, and ſo forth, ſaying, that
other like painful circum-
ſtances, yet if they come
ſhort of ſuch a ſhort-
coming, and ſo forth, ſaying,
of the **SECT.**
they cannot reaſonably
conclude from theſe places
that there ſins are unpur-
geable, and therefore
ſealed

of the day of grace,
which sometimes
is called the day
of grace, the
time of visitation, or
the accepted time.

It is certain that there is
nothing so irrecoverable,
or irrevocable as time when
it is once past and gone, so
that if any one's salvation
depend upon any certain
particular, or limited time,
it is as impossible for such
a one to be saved, if they
dye before that time of op-
portunity, as it is to call
time back again. Hence it
arise that unspeakable

124 *Of the day of grace,*
horreur, which sometimes
seizeth upon the soul, by
apprehending that the day
of grace is past and gone,
equall with that which a-
rileth from the apprehen-
sion of having committed
the sin against the Holy-
Ghost; because it is equally
impossible to recall that
time, which God hath fix-
ed by a firm decree; as to
obtain the pardon of that
sin, which God hath ab-
solutely pronounced un-
pardonable.

Now therefore for ex-
tricating the troubled soul
out of this *Labyrinth*, it
will be necessary to en-
quire, whether there be
any

any such fixed or limited time? which it is, and how it may be discovered?

10 There are three expressions in scripture which are commonly looked upon, as pointing out to us such a limited time. In Luke 19. 44. it is called *the time of visitation*. In 2 Cor. 6. 2. there is mention of the *accepted time, and the day of salvation*.

It will be necessary to premise something for explication of these expressions, that the way for resolving the doubts hence arising may be the more plain.

We must observe that

126 Of the day of grace;
the time, or day of visita-
tion, is used very variously
in Scripture. For some-
times there is mention of
a visitation in a way of
judgement, and sometimes
in a way of mercy. And in-
deed in the Old Testament
it is most frequently used
for the time of Gods Ru-
nishing or destroying a
people for their sins, as in
Jer. 10. 15. Jer. 49. 17. &c.
26. 14. And in Newt. 18. 29.
it is used to signify an un-
usual and strange kind of
death and destruction. This
kind of visitation is deli-
verable to none ~~from~~ guilt.

But otherwhile it is used
to signify Gods merciful
pro-

providences to a person or people. By his common providences of mercy he is said to visit, as *Psa.* 8. 4. and *Psa.* 65. 9. But in the new Testament the word is most commonly used to signify more speciall blessings.

1. As the great and general blessing of sending *Christ* into the world to redeem his people *Luk.* 1. 68. 78. *Luk.* 7. 16. And the particular time of this visitation is over to all, not to the prejudice, but to the generall benefit of the world.

2. It is used to signify all means of grace and offers of mercy by *Christ* in

328 *Of the day of grace,*

the Gospel, Luk. 19. 44.
How the time of this visitation is past away, shall be shewed upon.

3. It is used to signify the effectually blessing of the means of grace to the conversion of the persons so visited, as 1 Pet 2. 12. Now happy are those blessed souls, whose day of visitation in this sense is past, that can say, that the day and time is past, wherein the Lord did effectually visit them with offers of Christ and grace, to their acceptance and conversion.

As for the accepted time and the day of salvation, they

they signify one and the same thing, which is no other, but the time, wherein means of grace are afforded, and offers of *Christ*, and life by him are made to the soul. This is called *the accepted time*, because it is the time wherein, if we close with the offers that are made, and make a right improvement of the means that are afforded, God will accept of us in *Christ*. And it is called *the day of salvation*, because the means of grace and offers of *Christ*, are means and offers of salvation by *Jesus Christ*. So that the sense of these two lat-

129 Of the day of grace,
ter expressions falls in with
the second sense of the day
of visitation in mercy.

So then the meaning of
those expressions in refer-
ence to the present case is
this, viz. that there is a
time wherein God doth
mercifully visit a person or
people with the means of
grace, and offers of life, &
salvation by Jesus Christ,
wherewith if they shall
close by unfeigned repen-
tance and saving faith,
God will accept of them in
Christ according to the te-
mour of the Gospel.

Now for the clearing of
such doubts and difficul-
ties as may arise, concern-
ing

the time of Dec. ag-
ing this day of visitation,
and the accepted time, I
shall lay down these fol-
lowing propositions, 303

Prop. In reference to
Gods decree, the accepted
time can no more be past
now or another time, than
it was from all eternity.

For the decrees were
made from all eternity, and
do remain unchangeable
to all eternity.

But whatsoever there
is in these decrees, which
concerns the salvation or
damnation of any particu-
lar persons, is altogether
secret, God having no
where written them, nor
any way made them
known,

193 *of the day of grace,*
known, nor made them
possible to be searched in-
to, any further than the e-
vent doth declare them.
And therefore for any one
to conclude himself, either
from the beginning, or
from any particular time
or day past, to be in an un-
alterable state of reprobation,
is no better than an
horrid presumption proceeding
from the Devil
and a deluded heart, and
not any way from the
word or spirit of God.

2. Prop. The time of a
Nations or Peoples visita-
tion in generall may evi-
dently expire, and be vi-
sibly past. The Gospel may
be

be removed, and ordinances taken away from them, or so overwhelmed in a deluge of ignorance and error, that it may be truly said, that the accepted time and day of salvation is ceased unto them.

Yet this neither bars offers of grace, from being made to particular persons in that nation, nor makes them void to such, as are willing to accept and close with them. It is evident that there was such a cessation of the day of salvation to the Nation of the Jews, upon their rejection of Christ, *Matt.* 23. 37, 38. *Luk.* 19. 42, 44. And upon their

137 Of the day of grace,
their rejection of the
doctrine of the Gospel pub-
lished by the Apostles, *Act*
13. 46, 51. Act. 18. 6. Act.
28. 25. &c. 28. So that
they became no Church,
no peculiar people in that
special relation to God
wherein they had stood
for many ages before. Yet
we know that there were
many particular persons of
that nation, yea, some
thousands at that time and
afterwards, that, accepting
of the Gospel-offers of
grace, were accepted of
God, added to the Church
and made partakers of
Gospel salvation. *Act.*
2. 41. 47. Three thousand
at

at one time were added to
the Church, and no less
than five thousand at a-
nother time, 48. 4. 4. be-
sides those that came in
daily in smaller numbers.

3 Prop. The day of
grace cannot be said to
be past to any particular
person, so long as they
continue under the gene-
rall call of the Gospel, and
have any desire to close
therewith. And this is
to be understood, not on-
ly of such calls as may or
shall be made afterwards
for time to come, but
whosoever hath at any
time received a call by
the generall publication
of

136 *Of the day of grace,*
of the Gospel, though
they have hitherto reject-
ed and made light of all
those invitations, yet if
at any time while they
live, they shall have an
heartty desire, to come to
Christ for life, and to close
with him upon the terms
of the Gospel, then *is the*
accepted time, then *is the*
day of salvation; they shall
in no wise be cast off.

4. Prop. Yet without
question it is very dan-
gerous to put off invita-
tions, and to make excu-
ses, and delay the time of
our closure with Christ.
For while we are delaying
and rest in good purposes
for

for the future, death may come at unawares, and put an end indeed to the time of our visitation, and put us past a capacity of accepting, if we would.

Besides, by continuance in sin, the heart is hardened through the deceitfulness thereof, and becomes more, and more unfitted, and unwilling to be brought in subjection to the Government of *Christ*, and the terms of the Gospel.

And moreover, by delays and excuses, the Spirit of God is grieved, and may withhold his motions, and cease to stir up desires

38 Of the day of grace,
fires in the heart after
Christ any more. There-
fore it is good, to take the
spirits advice, to day if ye
will hear his voice, barden
not your hearts; take
Christ, and grace, and life,
while they are to be had;
for if we delay, though it
be but to another call, or
another day, we know
not what a day may bring
forth to our eternall pre-
judice. *Prop.* If after all this,
we could suppose, that the
time of any particular
persons visitation could be
past while he lives, yet
without all doubt it
leaves him under that stu-
pidity.

pidity and obduracy in
sin, that he is altogether
senseless of his condition,
and the misery of it: so
far is he from bewailing
the losse of his opportu-
nities, and wishing in that
respect, that time past
could be called back a-
gain.

So that I never desire a
more sure evidence, that a-
ny ones particular day of
grace is not past, than to
find him mourning under
the fears of it, bewailing
his sin, and want of grace,
and thirsting after Christ
and his righteousness.
To this head I shall
only add one word by way
of

140 *Of the day of grace,*
of explication of that ex-
pression of the Apostle
Paul, now is the accepted
time, now is the day of sal-
vation.

This word [Now] is
not to be understood so
restrictively, as if the A-
postle limited the accept-
ed time to that day or
hour, wherein he spake
or writ, but now, that is,
now that the partition
wall betwixt Jew and Gen-
tile is broken down, the
limits of the Church en-
larged, the Messiah re-
vealed, the Gospel preach-
ed, and all indifferently
called to faith and repen-
tance; now is the time
where-

wherein all without distinction may come in for a share, in the benefits purchased by *Jesus Christ*, and whosoever comes and closes with *Christ* upon the terms of the Gospel, shall be accepted and saved.

FINIS.

Christian Reader, be pleased to take
notice that these Books following are
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